

The Evacuation of the U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh **by Jay Raman**

Jay Raman is a public affairs officer at the U.S. embassy in Phnom Penh.

This April will also mark the 40th anniversary of the evacuation of the U.S. embassy in Phnom Penh (April 12, 1975, to be exact). Called Operation Eagle Pull, the evacuation was a tactical success, but just five days later the Khmer Rouge entered Phnom Penh, with tragic consequences for the Cambodian people.

The United States offered to evacuate remaining high-level government officials, but almost all declined and were later executed. One of these was Prince Sisowath Sirik Matak, who decided not to leave even though he was on a public list of traitors to be executed by the Khmer Rouge. Sirik Matak later took refuge in the French Embassy, but turned himself over to the Khmer Rouge when his position became hopeless.

Before the evacuation, Sirik Matak wrote a heartbreaking letter to U.S. Ambassador John Gunther Dean, which said:

"I thank you very sincerely for your letter and for your offer to transport me towards freedom. I cannot, alas, leave in such a cowardly fashion. As for you and in particular for your great country, I never believed for a moment that you would have this sentiment of abandoning a people which has chosen liberty. You have refused us your protection and we can do nothing about it. You leave us and it is my wish that you and your country will find happiness under the sky. But mark it well that, if I shall die here on the spot and in my country that I love, it is too bad because we are all born and must die one day. I have only committed the mistake of believing in you, the Americans. Please accept, Excellency, my dear friend, my faithful and friendly sentiments. Prince Sirik Matak"